

## Listeria

You can get very sick from some ready-to-eat foods if you wait too long to eat them. The sickness is called Listeriosis. A germ called Listeria causes it. It's unusual because it can grow at refrigerator temperatures where most other foodborne bacteria do not. You can't see it, smell it, or taste it. Only heat can kill it, but if heated food cools, listeria may grow again.

You should avoid some foods and take special care with others to prevent listeriosis

### Who's at risk?

- Pregnant women and their unborn babies
- Older adults
- People with cancer, AIDS, and other diseases that weaken the immune systems.

### How can I reduce my risk?

- Keep your fridge set at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or colder.
- Use precooked and ready-to-eat foods as soon as you can.

### Danger: Avoid These Foods

All pregnant women and others at risk should not eat certain foods.

- **Don't eat soft cheeses:**

- Mexican-style soft cheeses including: queso blanco, queso fresco, queso de hoja, queso de crema and asadero
- feta, brie, Camembert, blue cheese, and Roquefort
- cheeses made from raw milk.

You don't have to cut all cheeses from your diet. Cheese can be a good source of protein, vitamins, and calcium when you are pregnant.

**These cheeses are safe to eat:** hard cheeses (such as cheddar and Swiss); semi-soft cheeses such as mozzarella, pasteurized processed cheeses such as slices and spreads, cream cheese, and cottage cheese.

- **Don't eat refrigerated smoked seafood** right from the package, like salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna, or mackerel. They might be called "nova-style," "lox," "kippered," "smoked," or "jerky." It is safe to eat smoked seafood if it is cooked in its dish, like a casserole.

**Canned** seafood is safe. Examples are canned salmon or tuna in a pouch.

- **Don't eat refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads.** Canned meat spreads and pâtés are safe.
- **Don't eat raw (unpasteurized) milk or foods that contain raw milk.**

## ***Listeria (cont.)***

### **Be Careful With These foods**

- Ready-to-eat foods: Hot dogs, cold cuts, lunchmeats, deli counter meats, and other ready-to-eat foods. Eat these foods only if they're reheated until steaming hot. Even cured meats such as salami must be heated.
- Meats and seafood: Cook these all the way through. Stay away from rare meat and seafood.
- Leftovers: Reheat all until steaming hot.
- Fruits and vegetables: Listeria can grow on some fruits and vegetables. Do not buy sliced melon. Wash all fruits and vegetables with water. Scrub hard produce such as cucumbers and melons with a clean produce brush.

### **How can I keep my kitchen safe?**

- When you buy pre-cooked or ready-to-eat foods that go in the fridge, use them as soon as you can.
- Clean your fridge often.
- Make sure that the fridge always stays at 40 degrees F or colder. Use a refrigerator thermometer.
- Read labels. Follow instructions on foods that must be kept in the fridge or have a "use by" date.
- Wash your hands with warm soapy water after you touch raw foods. Wash any knives or other tools you used with hot, soapy water before you use them again.

You can get sick from two to 30 days after you eat food. Pregnant women can start early labor if the infection spreads to the unborn baby. Tell your doctor right away if you get any of these symptoms:

- fever and chills
- headache
- upset stomach
- throwing up

### **To Learn More...**

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)  
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition  
1-888-723-3366  
[www.cfsan.fda.gov](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov)

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)  
Food Information Hotline  
1-800-FDA-4010  
[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)